

**Palm Sunday
April 9, 2017**

"Jesus, Humbled and Exalted, Just for Us"

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Bucky and Rocky Covington were identical twin brothers who sang country music and competed against each other on the television show called *American Idol*. Rocky didn't get very far, but his twin brother Bucky went on to record and sell his songs. When they were in their late teens Rocky was arrested for pretending to be his brother after they were stopped for a speeding ticket. Identical twins can do that. One twin can switch places and even take a traffic ticket for the other twin.

I have a brother. He is not my twin. His name is Jesus. The book of Hebrews calls him my brother. He is the very Son of God from all eternity who has taken on my flesh, my bones and my skin and my hair. He has stepped into my place and lived the perfect life I could never live. He has stepped into my place and taken upon himself the full wrath and punishment of God for my sin.

Today on this Palm Sunday we see Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey just for us. Let's use these words we read to you from Philippians to see how Jesus our brother rides into Jerusalem to be humbled and exalted just for us.

Jesus humbled himself just for us

The Apostle Paul tells the Christians in Philippi they can have greater joy in their lives when they have the mindset or attitude that Jesus had when he came into this world to serve us. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant." Think of how much happier your life would be every day if you had the attitude of Jesus that puts other people ahead of yourself. Instead we look at our lives and see so many places where we have been self-centered, selfish, and worrying way to much about ourselves. We desperately need a Savior to rescue us from the punishment we deserve for this sin of being selfish and self-centered. Jesus saw us in our lost condition and he came to rescue us.

What a beautiful Savior we have. We see him riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. He doesn't look like much. Don't let your eyes deceive you. The hands that hold the mane

of the donkey to keep from falling are the hands of the Almighty God the Creator of the universe. Verse 6 says, "Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." Jesus did not have to reach for equality with God his Father because he is God from all eternity. He told the Jewish leaders who hated him, "I and the Father are one." This mighty Son of God who is equal with his Father has the power to take care of the punishment we deserve because of our sin.

Many of the people who welcomed Jesus with palm branches did not see him as their Lord and God. The prophet Isaiah said, "He grew up before him as a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." Our mighty Lord and God rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. He could have used his power as God to provide the finest chariot and horses anyone has ever seen, or a war horse snorting and pawing the ground with his power. He could have appeared to the people of Jerusalem in display of glory similar to what Peter, James and John saw on the mount of transfiguration.

Instead Jesus makes himself nothing and becomes a servant. "But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Jesus made himself nothing. He emptied himself. The word used here for making himself nothing or emptying himself could also be translated "poured out." Jesus emptied himself of his power as God, but never gave up his position as God. He did not use his power as God to come into Jerusalem on clouds of glory as he will someday when he returns. He did not use his power as God to deaden the pain and suffering as the nails were driven into his hands and he hung on the cross. He set this power aside to suffer and die for us, just for us.

Jesus also took on the nature of a servant. Look at Jesus the night before he died with his disciples in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover for the last time and the Lord's Supper for the first time. The water and towels are there for washing the feet before the meal. The disciples are reluctant to stoop down and wash each other's feet. Not Jesus. The room fills with the sound of water being poured over dirty feet. With a towel wrapped around him, one by one Jesus washes their feet. Then he says, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you."

Now look again at Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem just for you. It says, "And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross." Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to him as he rode into Jerusalem. He knew they would not stone him. He knew they would not execute him with a sword. He faced his death on the cross willingly. Oh, how the criminals struggled to get free as they had to be dragged fighting and screaming to the place of execution. Not so our Lord Jesus. Jesus carried his own cross to the Golgatha. He did it willingly. Isaiah predicted this would happen with the words, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth: he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

And yes, as strange as it may seem, Jesus joyfully rode into Jerusalem to face death on the cross because he was determined to rescue people like you and me. The book of Hebrews says "For the joy set before him Jesus endured the cross and the shame." It says in the book of Matthew that Jesus saw the people coming to him and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Ezekiel 34 describes this love

our shepherd has for sheep that are scattered. "So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill." That describes me! That describes me! Then the Lord says, "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them." There is my brother Jesus, my shepherd, riding into Jerusalem to rescue me.

There is a man in Australia, James Harrison, whose blood has saved 2.2 million babies. He has a rare antibody in his blood that stops babies from dying of Rhesus disease, a form of severe anemia. Mothers give birth to healthy babies because of the antibodies from his blood. He is also called the man with the golden arm. A week after his wife Barbara died he was back in the hospital giving more blood to save more babies. Jesus looked forward to shedding his blood on the cross to save us, to save people like us. "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, and for a good man some might possibly die. But God demonstrates his love to us in this: While we were sinners Christ died for us."

He was exalted just for us

Look even more closely at Jesus, your brother, your Lord and God as he rides into Jerusalem. His face shows he knows that glory is coming to him after he goes to the cross when his Father will exalt him. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We know that Jesus was thinking about this glory because of the prayer he prayed to his Father the night before his death. "Father the time has come, Glorify your Son, that he may glorify you." He prayed fervently. "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

Our heavenly Father has exalted Jesus to the highest place and given him a name that is above every other name. Ephesians 1 says that "God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and ever title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come." There is a name that is above every other name. The dying thief turned to Jesus and called on his name with these words, "Jesus remember when you come into your kingdom." And we pray while facing problems of life in Jesus' name,, simply and powerful prayers: "Lord Jesus, forgive me" or "Lord, Jesus help me."

Some day every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and God. When Christ Jesus comes in glory, even those who rejected him will have to admit the truth about Jesus, but for them it will be too late. The opportunity to have him as their Savior will have passed them by. They will only see Jesus as their Lord and Judge, but they will not have him as their Savior. The Revelation says, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be!"

Jesus does not want people to mourn when he comes on clouds of glory. He wants all people to lift their palm branches and wave them in glory in the place he has prepared for us. In the Revelation John saw a large multitude of people from all over the world standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb. "They were wearing white

robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice; 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" Because of Jesus, who was humbled and exalted for you, just for you, you can lift up your heads when he comes in glory to take you home. You can look forward to praising him with palm branches in the place he has prepared for you. Amen.